

Jeopardy Assessment
for the Proposed Incidental Taking Permit
of the Blanding's Turtle, K. Christen Property, Green County

Background

Project Information

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is proposing a restoration project in Green County. Re-establishment of 3.4 acres of floodplain forest will occur in existing cropland. Tree planting will occur in the spring along with a band herbicide treatment around the trees. To help control grass and weeds, two mowings will occur on the field in the year of the planting. The first mowing will occur between July 15th and July 31st and the second mowing will occur between September 1st and September 15th. Additionally, in order to provide residual weed control, one late fall strip spraying application will occur in late October or November following tree dormancy.

Shallow wildlife scrapes will be created by excavating an area less than one acre and shaping the side slopes. Disturbed areas will be broadcast seeded to a quick establishing cool season grass mix to prevent soil erosion. Spoil will be used to construct the ditch plug, spread 3-4' onto existing cropland in the floodplain, or removed from 100 year floodplain. Spoil will not be allowed to be spread less than 15 feet from open water.

A ditch plug will be constructed by placing excavated material into a ditch that is actively draining crop ground.

Current land use within the project boundary consists of agriculture, a CRP field, and existing floodplain forest. The agricultural areas are currently in a corn/soy bean rotation and were recently harvested. The forested areas contain primarily deciduous species dominated by silver maple. The floodplain reforestation area is located within the floodway of the Sugar River. As the Sugar River has reached flood stage more than 10 times in the last 2 years, this area is highly prone to flooding and crop losses.

Species Information

Blanding's turtles (*Emydoidea blandingii*) are listed as a Threatened species in Wisconsin. They utilize a wide variety of aquatic habitats including deep and shallow marshes, shallow bays of lakes and impoundments where areas of dense emergent and submergent vegetation exists, sluggish streams, oxbows and other backwaters of rivers, drainage ditches (usually where wetlands have been drained), and sedge meadows and wet meadows adjacent to these habitats.

Jeopardy Assessment

This project provides long-term habitat improvement, provides critical habitat for rare, threatened and endangered species, and provides increased stability (permanent cover) in an environmentally sensitive, flood-prone area. To increase the likelihood of success, NRCS is providing management during the establishment phase (mowing and herbicide). The short-term disruption incurred on this site will be minimal. As a result, we anticipate that take of Blanding's turtles will be low. The department has determined that the proposed project is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence or recovery of the state population of these animals or the whole plant-animal community of which they are a part, if the conservation measures listed below are followed. The benefits to public safety justify this activity. The

basis for this assessment is that the large benefit to the species and natural communities in the area far outweighs the small amount of temporary disturbance associated with this project.

Conservation Measures

- Tree Planting
 - The preferred time for tree planting is May 6th – May 20th. May 6th is typically the last date turtle hatchlings are seen emerging from overwintering; May 20th is the beginning of the turtle nesting season for this year. Mechanical or hand tree planting during this time will avoid take of turtles in the area.
 - If tree planting must occur before May 6th, hand planting trees will minimize the risk of take to hatchling turtles.
 - If tree planting occurs before May 6th by mechanical means, there is a greater risk of take to hatchling turtles.
- All cool season seed planting should occur between May 6th and May 20th. If planting is done after May 20th, it should only occur between 10:00am and 5:00pm as to avoid likely times a female turtle will be present and laying her eggs.
- Mowing
 - Mowing conducted in wetland habitat (tree and cool season grass plantings) should only occur when temperatures are below 55 degrees. Mowing height needs to be 8 inches and above if conducted from March 15th – October 15th. There are no height restrictions from October 16th – March 14th. The mower being used should not create suction as to not pull up turtles, nesting birds, or other wildlife that may be present in the field.
- Herbiciding
 - The preferred methods of herbiciding are spot, basal bark, and/or cut-stump treatments.
 - If broadcast spraying must be used, the preferred time for herbiciding is May 6th – May 20th when no turtles are nesting and from October 16th – March 14th when the turtles are not active.
 - If broadcast spraying occurs outside of the May 6th – May 20th and October 16th – March 14th windows, there is a greater risk of take to both adult and hatchling turtles.
- A Blanding's turtle walk-through removal should be conducted by a qualified biologist in the ditch prior to filling activities. Removed turtles should be placed outside the project area in suitable turtle habitat.